



# Irving Park Lutheran Church 100th Anniversary, Part I: 1903-1928

## IN THE BEGINNING

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Irving Park Lutheran Church, it is appropriate that we pay tribute to the people whose vision and dedication made it all possible. While countless churches have come and gone, IPLC has survived and thrived because of a firm foundation, and the strength and dedication of its members.

Condensing 100 years into four 25-year chapters limited by space is challenging, but we believe it is important for today's church members to fully appreciate the sacrifices and hard work of our church founders. From the Lutheran missionaries who first targeted the Irving Park neighborhood when it was covered by prairies, through days when Easter services attracted more than 1,000 worshippers, to our current program of community ministry, this is your Irving Park Lutheran Church.

Over the next four months, we hope to take you on a trip through IPLC's past as we eagerly look forward to the next century of progress.

While our church officially was formed on Wednesday, Dec. 30, 1903, its roots can be traced to the 1890s. The Irving Park neighborhood history goes back to before the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. But the partnership between Swedish immigrants and Irving Park didn't flourish until the last years of the 19th century.

New subdivisions and inexpensive homes lured hundreds of Swedes to the prairies of the Northwest Side. Large families were drawn to the territory bordered by Irving Park, Kedzie, Lawrence and Crawford (later Pulaski). This square mile became home for many people who had no church affiliation, while some families belonged to older Augustana Lutheran churches throughout Chicago.

Many Swedes wanted their children to attend a Swedish Lutheran Sunday School, but getting to their old churches was easier said than done because of a transportation system in its infancy. So the movement began to create a new Lutheran church in the Irving Park community.

It was Palm Sunday on March 31, 1901, when six missionaries from Immanuel Church at Sedgwick and Hobbie streets traveled to the home of Aaron and Hettee Olson at 811 Irving Park. (The house was between Central Park and Monticello on the north side of Irving Park. It later became home to Salomon's Shoe Store in 1916, and remains standing at 3614 W. Irving Park, directly across the street from the McDonald's drive-through pickup window. Between 1908 and 1910, the Chicago street-numbering system was revamped, and many street names and addresses were changed.)

The missionaries' mission was to



3614 W. Irving Park in 2003.

form a Sunday School to serve the people of Irving Park. Over the next 20 months, the Sunday School pioneers held classes in different locations until a regular church service was held Nov. 22, 1903, in Race's Hall, 4156 W. Irving Park. People hoping to see Race's Hall today will have to use their imagination. The current location is filled with concrete and pigeons underneath the Kennedy Expressway overpass.

The Nov. 22, 1903, church service was significant. The preachers at the service were Pastor Sven Pearson, who earlier that fall had been called by the Salem Church (which became Concordia at 3855 N. Seeley), and Rev. Theodore S. Johnston, pastor at Ebenezer Lutheran at 1650 W. Foster. Children from the nomadic Sunday School, which had grown significantly over the previous 32 months, marched into the service. The group numbered about 30, and it was clear to Rev. Pearson that the time had come to officially form a new congregation. A questionnaire was circulated, asking if people would like to see a new Swedish Lutheran Church organized. The survey results led to a meeting called for the evening of Wednesday, Dec. 30, 1903, at the home of Louis M. and Hannah L. Nelson, 2477 Syracuse. (That address later became 4048 N. Harding, the second building south of Belle Plaine.)

## DAY ONE

The attendance at the L.M. Nelson home meeting was smaller than anticipated. It wasn't because of a lack of interest. The Iroquois Theater fire tragedy earlier in the day disrupted the city's streetcar service. More than 600 people at the matinee performance of "Mr. Blue Beard" died as a result of the blaze at the "fireproof" theater at 24-28 W. Randolph. About 30 people made the journey to the Nelson home. Rev. Pearson presided at the meeting. It was unanimously decided to organize a Swedish Lutheran Church of the Augustana Synod of North America. Rev. Pearson agreed to serve as pastor (in addition to his work at Salem). The group also elected a congregation secretary, treasurer, deacons and trustees. But the group disagreed over what to call the new church. So the meeting was adjourned for two weeks. At the adjourned meeting, the members agreed to call their congregation the "Irving Park Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church" and the name was incorporated. It was agreed that services would continue at Race's Hall until a permanent location could be secured. A few weeks later, the Irving Park Swedish Mission Congregation agreed to let the new church use its building on Eberly (now St. Louis) Avenue. Services continued at that site until the congregation moved into its own church building on Feb. 5, 1905.



Dr. Danell with Sunday School children in 1906.

## THE BUILDING BLOCKS

The Sunday School was organized Nov. 22, 1903. It began with 30 students, F. Edward Chindblom as superintendent and teachers Mathilda Anderson, Hannah Peterson and John A. Carlson. At the end of 1904, the Sunday School numbers had grown to 120, with 112 children and eight teachers. Our early church historian, L.M. Nelson, noted that Chindblom was a jack-of-all-trades who received "no remuneration worth mentioning." In addition to his duties as superintendent, Chindblom served as congregational secretary, deacon, treasurer of the Men's Society, and later the janitor of the new church building. The Ladies Society was organized March 17, 1904, at the home of Peter and Ida Carlson, 2530 (4145) N. Drake. Only seven were able to attend the meeting because of bad weather, but 15 women were considered charter members. Dues were 25 cents per month. Through festivals and sales, the Ladies Society raised enough money to pay for the first church lot in December 1904. The Brotherhood was formed April 21, 1904, at the home of Edward and Emelia Carlson, 4327 N. Crawford. The group's purpose was to raise money for a church building. The Brotherhood, which paid for the furnace in the first church, evolved into the Finance Society and later the Men's Society. The group contributed \$264.63 to the church in 1905. The collections and offerings of the church without a home for the entire first year amounted to less than \$360.

Swedish was the church's official language until the time of World War I. Swedish was used in Sunday School, and classes were confirmed in Swedish. Starting in 1914, only the evening services were conducted in English. When the war began, the church made English the official language of the Sunday School. In 1917, the church offered a 9:30 a.m. Swedish service at the same time that children were speaking English in Sunday School. The 11 a.m. service was in English. It was noted that the two services were popular and attendance increased dramatically.

## IPLC TRIVIA

We've scanned the first 25 years of Forsamlings-Bladets, Tidings and Bulletins and compiled some timeless trivia and tidbits found throughout this and the following issues.

· July 5, 1908: Dr. Joshua Odén preached his first sermon at IPLC. His salary in 1909 was \$1,000 plus the parsonage. He arrived the same year that the Chicago Cubs last won a World Series.

· November 1908 to November 1909: Sunday School increased by 38 children to 193, with the Sunday collection increasing \$2.42 to an average of \$14.64 per week.

## THE DR. DANELL ERA

In the fall of 1904, before the first building was erected, Rev. Pearson left to organize another church, which later became St. John's at 3052 N. Spaulding. In October 1904, the congregation called on K.A. Danell, a student at the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, to take over as a lay worker. Rev. Theodore S. Johnston of Ebenezer was called as vice pastor.

The early church historians said Dr. Danell was a very good preacher, and Rev. Johnston conducted many baptisms, including one in which 30 children received the sacrament.



Dr. Danell

The first Confirmation class had 21 students. A Luther League and Young Women's Society also were formed in the early days of the church. In the spring of 1906, Dr. Danell was called to be the first official pastor after his ordination later that summer. For some reason, Dr. Danell did not apply for ordination. Instead, his ordination was rescheduled for June 1907, after which he became Irving Park's first regular pastor. But Dr. Danell, who also was a medical doctor, did not remain as pastor very long. He returned his ministerial papers and left the ministry at the end of 1907.



The first parsonage, erected in 1909.

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## EMAUS CONNECTION

Emaus Church of Jefferson Park played a role in the early days of IPLC. Emaus existed from 1895-1905. When Emaus was unable to secure a pastor for an extended period, many Emaus members switched to Irving Park. When Emaus closed permanently, some of its possessions were to be transferred to IPLC provided that Irving Park would take care of Emaus' outstanding financial matters. IPLC received the Emaus pulpit, baptismal font, chairs and the bell that had been in the

Emaus Church tower which IPLC used for about 20 years.

Emaus or Emmaus? A few early IPLC publications spelled the name of the church "Emmaus" (the same as a location in the Bible outside Jerusalem). But IPLC still has the original membership records of Emaus from 1895, and they indicate it was spelled Emaus. Whether it was a typo or intended is open to interpretation.

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## MORE IPLC TRIVIA

- July 1909: A six-week Vardagskola (or Bible School) was offered from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at a cost of 25 cents per week.
- Oct. 10, 1909: Cradle Roll Mothers meeting was held to get children involved in church activity at an early age. About 50 children were enrolled.
- April 21, 1910: Ladies Aid yearly spring concert was a huge success. Pastor Gottfred Nelson offered the women a chance to travel to Yellowstone National Park.

- July 1910: Because of the heat, evening services were held on the green outside the church. Benches and electric lights were installed for the outdoor services.
- 1915-1916. English services were offered on a trial basis.
- September 15, 1915: The rummage sale committee sought donations for the sale in October.
- September 25, 1915: The Luther League, with 15 girls and 15 boys, gathered at Milwaukee and Lawrence for a hike back to church "with farms on all sides."

## THE OLD CHURCH

After the congregation was organized Dec. 30, 1903, the next step was to find a location for a church building. At the time, there was a rumor that wealthy land owner William B. Walker would be willing to give a lot to the first congregation that was organized in the Irving Park neighborhood. That rumor proved to be unfounded. Walker was willing to make a special price on a lot east of Elston, but would not sell a lot for a church west of Elston. The committee decided to find a lot outside of the Walker domain.



The Old Church, Front and inside

A 49 x 125-foot lot on the northwest corner of Belle Plaine and Harding was purchased for \$600 on Aug. 31, 1904. An architect was hired to design a church, but the initial estimates proved to be too costly for the young congregation. It was decided to build a temporary church along the alley to leave room for a permanent building in the future. The corner lot was too small, so the adjacent 30-foot lot was purchased for \$420 on Dec. 9, 1904.

L.M. Nelson, Aaron Johnson and Edward Carlson were each asked to prepare a plan for a building. Nelson's design was accepted.

At a congregational meeting on Dec. 7, 1904, it was

decided to erect the frame building. The next morning, without any ceremony, two members of the congregation began construction. Through the cold of winter, in less than two months, the first church building was

completed and ready for its first service on Feb. 5, 1905. A little more than 13 months after its formation, Irving Park Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church had found a simple, permanent home, much to the delight of its members.

The church building was dedicated June 18, 1905. In December 1905, another 35-foot lot north of the church was purchased for \$500. That became the home of the future parsonage, which was erected during the winter of 1908-09.

The first church building remained on the back of the lots at the northwest corner of Belle Plaine and Harding until the fall of 1916. Then it was moved to the southeast corner of the intersection on a lot that was owned by L.M. and Hannah Nelson.

Through the 20th century, the old building went through many makeovers. Today, parts of what's left of the old church are incorporated in the house at 4017 N. Harding.

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## THE OLD STEPS

The moving of the first church building was an emotional moment for many members of the congregation. The steps were all that was left behind after the "little old church" was moved across the street. A photo of the steps caused the editor of the "Forsamlings Bladet," which translates to "Congregational Newsletter" and was the predecessor of "The Tidings," to reflect:

"They had borne old and young into the House of God; they had been the means of both joy and happiness. O'er their bosom the children and youth had merrily tripped and young, light hearts had entered into the house to be joined in holy matrimony. Over it many a heavy heart had also passed as they carried their dear ones in and out of the House of God for the last time. Now the steps seemed to be forgotten and stood in all their lonesomeness."

After a few days, the steps were re-attached to the first church and continued their mission until they were removed once and for all.



The Old Steps

## THE NEW CHURCH BUILDING

It didn't take long for the Irving Park pioneers to realize that a larger church needed to be built to handle the ever-increasing membership.

In 1912, the "New Church Building Committee" was formed to start the project. Eighteen committee members worked many hours, studying plans and deliberating

the new church project. The cornerstone, still visible today, was put in place Oct. 1, 1916.

Henry Eckland of Moline was the architect. John B. Colleur did the masonry, while Louis Nelson and Aaron Johnson supervised the construction. When the project was completed, the Building Committee was lauded for its efforts because the new building cost less than \$40,000.



Interior of the Church circa 1928

A few individuals and groups were cited in the 25-year anniversary book as having played key roles in the formation of the new church building. The following paragraph is taken from the "Silver Jubilee 1903-1928" book: "Mr. Charles Skog made the altar, pulpit, and chancel rail, and practically donated this

to the church. Mr. Andrew Carnegie presented the church with about one-half the cost of the organ. The pews were furnished by the Ladies Society. The large window in the rear of the church was given by the Sunday Bible School. The Dorcas Guild presented the painting in the [sanctuary]. When the church was dedicated on the four hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in

1917, the congregation felt that it had a church plant which would be adequate for many years to come."

Toward the end of Irving Park's first quarter century, it was time to expand. In 1926, an Extension Committee was formed. The group was well aware that more space was needed to handle the church's ever-increasing numbers. But there was debate on whether to add an addition to the church or construct another building. The future would be determined at a congregational meeting on Feb. 28, 1929.



The Original Building Committee: Top (L-R): Alfred Carlson, A.M. Mylen, Gust Olson, O.T. Olson, A.D. Lundquist. Middle: F.W. Goranson, Carl Lundgren, C.M. Turnquist, Olof Nelson, Robert Holmbom, J.W. Bogren. Bottom: Aaron Johnson, L.M. Nelson, Dr. Joshua Oden, Robert E. Landon, J. W. Lundquist

## MORE FUN FACTS

· Sept. 28, 1915: Luther League's "Hard Time Party," a festival where no dues were collected, girls came as maids and boys came with no collar or necktie, which "gave the appearance of hard times."

· Oct. 15, 1915: The congregation was up to 450 members.

· Oct. 23, 1915: Luther League social evening, featuring the game of "Elopement." "Much fun was had at the expense of the Elopers." (Thankfully, no further details provided).

· Oct. 23, 1915: L.M. and Hannah Nelson donated a 1-foot tall "Loving Cup" for Luther League team that won a debate series arranged by the Literary Committee.

· March 16, 1916: Parent Sunday attracted 428 people, too much for the little church. The extra people crowded into Luther Hall (the L.M. Nelson garage).

· April 7, 1916: Luther League sponsored a concert by "The Enterprise Institute Jubilee Quartet," a group of talented African-Americans, to raise money for the new church. Admission was 25 cents for adults, 15 cents for children.

## DR. JOSHUA ODÉN

While thousands have contributed to the success of Irving Park Lutheran, our church's driving force for more than a half-century was Dr. Joshua Odén. He served our congregation as pastor from 1908 to 1954, and was pastor emeritus from 1954 to 1969. Since his contributions were so immense, it would take another special edition of this 100-year commemorative to



Dr. Joshua Odén  
in 1908



Pastor Odén with his  
first Confirmation class.

give Joshua and Helga Odén their much-deserved credit. Because of space constraints with the first 25 years, we will address Pastor Odén's legacy throughout our journey through IPLC history.

## MUSIC

From its inception, Irving Park has been blessed with talented musicians. The first organist was Hannah Peterson-Olsen, and A.D. Lindquist was the first choir leader. By 1908, the choir of 30 voices strong sang mostly Swedish hymns and a few David's Psalms. George A. Carlson was choir director from 1916 to 1921, when Harry T. Carlson took over and made the Chorus-Choir one of the outstanding musical organizations in Chicago. Lillian Carlson, wife of Harry T. Carlson, was one of the featured soloists. She later became the longest-serving organist in our history (37 years, from 1939-1976). The Junior Choir began in 1908. Also, the church featured music by the Girls Glee Club, Ladies Chorus and Male Chorus.

The Moller-Carnegie pipe organ was built especially for Irving Park in 1917, and has been amplified and enlarged before being replaced in 1953.

## MORE IPLC TRIVIA

- May 7, 1916: The last class was confirmed in the old church.
- January 1921: Camp Fire Girls was close to having enough girls for a second troop.
- January 1921: Queen Esther Circle bought a new pulpit.
- January 1921: Church set a goal of boosting membership to 1,000.
- February 1921: The first phone was installed in the church office. It was the same number as the phone in the parsonage (Irving 6173).
- February 1921: Brotherhood held a "Father and Sons" banquet in "Dining Hall."

- Nov. 12, 1922: The chancel mural, "Road to Jerusalem," was completed. It was painted from a photograph of the Jerusalem-Damascus road brought back by Pastor Odén. Max Herzog was the artist.
- April 15, 1928: Automobile Sunday. Everyone was asked to bring their automobiles to church. The Boy Scouts guarded the automobiles.
- April 8, 1928: Easter Sunday services attracted 1,011 worshippers.
- 1928: The Confirmation class had 57 members.

- July 5, 1928: Pastor Odén was honored for his 20 years of service.
- Oct. 7, 1928: Rally Day. A panorama picture was taken of the Sunday School children along the church on Belle Plaine. Between 500 and 600 children were present. It was noted: "When the 50th anniversary is to be written, the 1928 program will play a part."
- Dec. 28, 1928: Silver Jubilee Dinner was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. Almost 1,000 attended. Tickets cost \$5.

## GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

No one could say there was nothing to do at Irving Park. Members of each organization played a role in the church's development. If we had a few hundred more pages, we could detail each group and their accomplishments, but the groups deserve to be mentioned. A few of the organizations (in no particular order):



Maria Circle, 1928

Board of Administration, Board of Deacons, Sunday Bible School, Confirmants' Alumni, Ingathering Committee, Promotion Committee, Friendly Volunteers, Friendly Visitors, Friendly Spirit Committee, Ushers, Chorus Choir, Junior Choir, Ladies Society, Martha Circle, Maria Circle, Woman's Mission Society, Junior Mission Band, Dorcas Guild, Ruth Circle, Loa Girls, Queen Esther Circle, Brotherhood, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Senior Luther League, Junior Luther League, Expansion Committee, Young Men's Club, girls and boys basketball teams, baseball team, etc.



Girls Scouts, 1928



Luther League, circa 1928



Boys Scouts, 1928



1928 Baseball team.



1928 Girls Basketball Team

*“Continuing the Journey”* having officially gotten under way at IPLC September 7, Rally Day Sunday, continues. The next special anniversary event is Sunday, October 5, Baptism Anniversary Sunday. All persons who have been baptized at IPLC are asked to telephone and inform the church office of 1) the date of your baptism, 2) the pastor by whom you were baptized, and 3) if you will be able to be in

attendance. The service begins at 10:30 a.m. and will be followed by a special reception in Victory Hall.

### Thank you

We are indebted to Ralph Greenslade who is writing the history of the congregation's century of ministry. This special issue is the first of four to be issued September through December of 2003. And special thanks to Roger Bingaman, editor.

### Change of Plans

Due to a fire which has destroyed the Terrace Restaurant at the Wilmette Country Club, the date and venue of the Anniversary Banquet have changed. The new date is Sunday, April 18, 12:30-4:00 p.m., at Colletti's Dining and Banquets, Central Ave. at Elston. Information on the program, cost and making reservations is forthcoming.

# TIDINGS

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Special 100th Anniversary Issue

Irving Park Lutheran Church



# TIDINGS

From **Irving Park Lutheran Church**

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